

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend claims 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) Branched polymer comprising, ~~characterised in that it is derived from~~ the following mixture of monomers:
- (A) 50 to 93 wt.% of at least one ethylenically unsaturated monomer, wherein the monomer comprises an acrylate ester or a methacrylate ester of a straight or branched alcohol having from 1 to 22 carbon atoms;
- (B) 2 to 25 wt.% of at least one ethylenically unsaturated macromonomer with a molecular weight of 1,000 to 20,000 and
- (C) 5 to 25 wt.% of at least one polymerisable imidazole derivative, wherein components (A), (B) and (C) together make up 100 wt.%; and the polymer possesses a number average molecular weight (M_n), of 15,000 to 100,000 and is optionally present in the form of a salt.
2. (Currently Amended) The branched ~~Branched~~ polymer according to claim 1, wherein component (B) is present in a quantity of 5 to 15 wt.% and component (C) in a quantity of 10 to 20 wt.%.
3. (Currently Amended) The branched ~~Branched~~ polymer according to claim 1, wherein the molecular weight of the polymer is 25,000 to 75,000, preferably 30,000 to 50,000.
4. (Currently Amended) The branched ~~Branched~~ polymer according to claim 1, wherein component (A) is optionally comprises a hydroxyalkyl or an alkyl polyalkylene glycol acrylate or methacrylate, a styrene or derivative thereof or a vinyl ether and component (B) is a poly(meth)acrylate with terminal (meth)acrylic function or a monovinyl-terminated polydimethylsiloxane and component (C) is N-vinylimidazole.

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5. (Currently Amended) The branched ~~Branched~~ polymer according to claim 1, wherein this is present as a salt of a fatty acid, a hydroxycarboxylic acid, a sulfonic acid, a sulfate, an acidic phosphate or an inorganic acid.
6. (Currently Amended) A process ~~Process for the production of preparing~~ a branched polymer, ~~characterised in that~~ comprising:
- (A) 50 to 93 wt.% of at least one ethylenically unsaturated monomer, wherein the monomer comprises an acrylate ester or a methacrylate ester of a straight or branched alcohol having from 1 to 22 carbon atoms;
- (B) 2 to 25 wt.% of at least one ethylenically unsaturated macromonomer with a molecular weight of 1,000 to 20,000 and
- (C) 5 to 25 wt.% of at least one polymerisable imidazole derivative wherein the (A),(B), and (C) components are polymerised by free-radical polymerisation in the presence of an organic solvent and at least one radical initiator, at a temperature of 50 to 180°C, and wherein the polymer ~~thus obtained~~ is optionally converted to its salt.
7. (Currently Amended) The process ~~Process~~ according to claim 6, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the organic solvent is an ester and the radical initiator is a peroxide or an azo compound.
8. (Currently Amended) The process ~~Process~~ according to claim 6, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the reaction temperature is 90 to 150°C.

Claims 9-11 cancelled.

12. (Previously Added) A paint, paste or modeling composition comprising a pigment and/or filler and a branched polymer according to claim 1, wherein the branched polymer is a dispersing agent.

13. (Previously Added) The composition of claim 12 further comprising a binder.
14. (Previously Added) The composition of claim 12, wherein the branched polymer is used in a quantity of 0.5 to 100 wt.% based on the solid to be dispersed.
15. (Previously Added) A coating for powdered or fibrous solids comprising a branched polymer according to claim 1.
16. (Previously Added) The coating of claim 15, wherein the branched polymer is used in a quantity of 0.5 to 100 wt.% of the solid.

Please add claims 17-19 as follows:

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17. (New) The branched polymer according to claim 1, wherein component (A) further comprises cycloaliphatic acrylates; cycloaliphatic methacrylates; aralkyl acrylates; aralkyl methacrylates; acrylates with a hydroxy function; methacrylates with a hydroxy function; styrene; alpha-methylstyrene; triethylene glycol monomethacrylate, acrylonitrile, butoxypropylene glycol methacrylate, ethyl vinyl ether, butyl vinyl ether cyclohexyl vinyl ether, or mixtures thereof as comonomers.
 18. (New) The branched polymer according to claim 1 or 17, wherein the acrylate ester or methacrylate ester is methyl acrylate, ethyl acrylate, butyl acrylate, lauryl acrylate, 2-ethylhexyl acrylate, stearyl acrylate, behenyl acrylate, cyclohexyl acrylate, isobornyl acrylate, benzyl acrylate, hydroxyethyl acrylate, hydroxypropyl acrylate, triethylene glycol monoacrylate, butoxypropylene glycol acrylate, methyl methacrylate, ethyl methacrylate, butyl methacrylate, lauryl methacrylate, 2-ethylhexyl methacrylate, stearyl methacrylate, behenyl methacrylate, cyclohexyl methacrylate, isobornyl methacrylate, benzyl methacrylate, hydroxyethyl methacrylate, hydroxypropyl methacrylate, triethylene glycol monomethacrylate, butoxypropylene or glycol methacrylate, or mixtures thereof.

- 19 (New) The branched polymer according to claim 18, wherein component (A) further comprises acrylonitrile, styrene, alpha-methylstyrene, ethyl vinyl ether, butyl vinyl ether cyclohexyl vinyl ether, or mixtures thereof.
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